

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, February 8, 1878, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. 57 West Cromwell Road, Saturday February 8th. (1878) My dear Mrs. Bell:

I beg your pardon for letting so many weeks pass without writing to you. I had no idea how long a time it was, and I had so much to say to Mamma which I thought you would not care so much to hear about. My details about the ceremonies at the Baroness Burdett Coutts, the bowing and standing in presence of Royalty would not have the charm of novelty to you they would to my American friends, and my head was full of them.

We have received two or three letters from you, which we, and especially of course Alec, have much enjoyed reading. I am so sorry you have had such unsatisfactory weather this winter. I believe ours has been good for this climate, but for America it would be called warm wet chilly all at once but I like it better than real cold, and ice and snow. It is pleasant to see the grass in our little garden so fresh and green, instead of being covered with dreary white snow.

We have been quite gay lately, callers have been here almost every day for the past week or two, we have been out to a dinner party, and to two lectures in full dress. The reception at the Baroness Burdett Coutts made quite an excitement in anticipation and afterwards. I presume Mamma has sent you my letters about it. The latest excitement is Stanley's lecture at St. James Hall. We were particularly fortunate in securing three admissions, though 900 applications were refused the first day the tickets were issued. Alec went with a friend of his and Mr. Home escorted me in Alec's name. We reached the hall at quarter past seven, and found the immense hall already as full as it would hold, except the reserved seats on the platform, and the two ends of the galleries touching the platform on either side, and some cushioned seats right in front of the platform. My ticket admitted me

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to these seats, which were reserved for the ladies of distinguished man on the platform, and for the Prince of Wales and suite, 2 but through some mistake I was shown to a seat in one of the gallery ends, while Mr. Home was put on the platform just a step beneath me and separated by a railing. Early as it was Mr. Home pointed out to me a little old man with long grey beard and wide make hat, seated in one of the front seats of the platform, and told me it was Moffat the 90 year old father of Livingstone. Gradually the benches filled and I saw Grant, a fine looking tall old man, Cameron a small slender young man with brown beard and hair loudly cheered whenever he rose and pointed out some particular spot of interest on the big charts at the back of the platform. The Chinese Ambassador came in and took his place beside Cameron, a little man he, in costume much sobered down, but very much a chinaman. By this time the green seats in front were filled with lightly dressed ladies, and the platform too was full, several gentlemen wearing orders the Star of India being the most common. Then all of a sudden the vast audience rose to their feet, and we saw the Prince of Wales come in and take his seat in front of the ladies, when the people sat down we saw, on his right a Turk, on his left the pale delicate face of the Prince Imperial of France, on his left two men Turks, then the Duke of Sutherland (I think) then, the frank boyish face and light wavy hair of the young Prince of Austria. Than before the cheering for the Royal Party and especially for the Turks headed by Nidhat Pasha who was the Turk on the Prince of Walee' right on the French Prince's left we are not sure, had died away it was renewed at the entrance of Stanley and the meeting was at once opened by the President. He made a speech which whatever it's merits had the great defect of being altogether too long to suit the impatience of the people who at last became almost disorderly, there were cries for "Stanley! Stanley!!" answered by cheers and hisses for which they were rebuked by the President who went on undaunted to the very end of his carefully prepared essay. At last, stanley came forward. He is a young man of five and thirty but hard teil and suffering have made his head as grey as that of 3 many a man of sixty. He is more like a Frenchman than an American. He has the swarthy flat oval face of most Frenchmen, his figure too is short but slender and lithe, he were the insignia of many orders suspended around his neck or fastened on his coat, and the ribbons of one was

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such a brilliant scarlet that they gave him a decidedly gaudy appearance. We did not like his manner at all he held his arms akimbo a good part of the time which we thought hardly elegant or impressive, then he swung himself back and forward or swept the audience with a very self satisfied expression of countenance. We could see him very well for he often turned almost quite around to the scientific men at his back, who one by one slowly but surely began to leave the hall ere the lecture was half over. Alec sends you a notice of his lecture, so you can judge somewhat of what it was like, but the reporter omitted much, You perceive he took up about an hour in talking about himself and his motives and in "patting himself on the head", while of the wonderful history of his adventures and discoveries not a word was said. Alec, who by the bye has joined us and who told me all that Stanley said kept saying how egotistical he was. If this is man's English for conceited I quite agreed with him. After Stanley had finished the Prince of Wales arose and moved a vote of thanks in what Alec said was a very well spoken speech, he was followed by Sir Samuel Baker bluff and hearty a thorough Englishman. He was dressed in uniform, and spoke for a few minutes listened too with what I thought remarkable patience on the part of the audience who seemed eager to get away. But Alec Said the Prince of Wales made by far the best speech of the evening. Next day we saw Lady Thomson and she told us the Prince shared this gift of speaking well in public with all the Royal family and especially with the Princess Louisa of Lorne. Alec thinks he can see the germ of his father's nose in the young Prince Imperial's but I think his whole face is too delicate and refined ever to be like Napoleon's. He has his Mother's straight eyebrows. Lady Thomson says many stories are told of his 4 extraordinary activity, he once leaped on the back of a horse that was being exhibited before him and rode off on him much to the astonishment of the horse groom and spectators.

Tonight we are going to see the distribution of prizes to the London Scottish Volunteers to which our friend, the young son of the lady who owns our house, belongs. Afterwards we go to the Folly Theater. On Tuesday we dine out of town with Alec's solicitor Mr. Morgan Brown, on Wednesday Alec goes to the meeting of the Society of Telegraph Engineers.

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Alec is F. R.S.A. M. S. T. E., Member Scientific Club and Junior Atheneum Club. He has refused an offer to be nominated for the Atheneum Club.

Our wire between Mrs. Home's and our house is up and working nicely.

Alec seems very well and bright and is working on very well. He is getting into regular habits, we have breakfast at nine though I am always dressed before half past eight and try hard to have it then. It is a good hearty meal, with hot meat or something warm and substantial. We have lunch at two cold meat bread and cheese so I think we do very well, even if we do have dinner so late. Alec comes to bed at one, I have a little lamp clock, A lamp inside the globe bearing the fingers of a clock, the machinery near the oil should be, and the hour hand fastened to the machinery and stationary while the globe revolves around it so that the lamps show the time in darkness. I light this and put it on Alec's table when I go upstairs at ten, so he can not mistake or ignore the time, and he comes up very punctually, sleeps very well after it.

Now I must close this very long letter with love to Mr. Bell and the Miss Symonds,

Affectionately, Mabel.